



The Harvard Law School Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild declares its solidarity with and support for the national prisoners' work stoppage planned for September 9, 2016. Prisoners in the United States are forced to work for little to no pay, functionally enslaved within the prison system. While the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery and involuntary servitude for most Americans, it included an exception for penal servitude. In the era of mass incarceration, three strikes laws, and discriminatory policing, this means that over 2 million people living the United States are subjected to forced labor every single day. Indeed, there are more Black people in prison, jail, or on parole in this country today than there were living under slavery a decade before the Civil War.

As a result of this loophole in the Thirteenth Amendment, prisoners are forced to work an average of eight hours a day, and those workers who receive payment at all only make between \$0.23 and \$1.15 per hour, six times lower than the federal minimum wage. These workers have no say over which kinds of labor they are assigned to, and are denied union representation, health insurance, family benefits, sick days, hazard pay, and a host of other basic provisions. Due to the increasing costs of commissary items combined with extremely low or non-existent wages, many prisoners are released from prison with more debt than when they entered. The main beneficiaries of this brutal and exploitative system are the U.S. Military (100% of military helmets and a significant portion of other military supplies are produced by enslaved prisoners) and private corporations, including Whole Foods, McDonalds, Wal-Mart, Victoria's Secret, AT&T, British Petroleum, Microsoft, Nike, Sprint, Verizon, Wendy's, and Starbucks, among others. This is how corporations and the U.S. government benefit financially from mass incarceration, and as a result, corporate shareholders who profit from this system continue to lobby for harsher sentencing and heavier policing. We demand that this systematic exploitation of prisoners for the benefit of corporate profiteers and the U.S. Military be brought to a halt!

September 9, 2016 marks the 45th anniversary of the 1971 Attica prison takeover, in which one thousand inmates seized control of New York state's most notorious prison in order to demand the recognition of their dignity as human beings. Prison and state authorities reacted violently, storming the prison and killing 29 prisoners and 10 hostages in the process. The Attica takeover did not occur in isolation; for years, prisoners in Walpole, San Quentin, Soledad, and Angola also stood up in opposition to their overseers, and the authorities likewise responded with violence. Forty-five years later, in this era of mass incarceration, the conditions that led prisoners to rebel in Attica have not only reappeared, but have worsened. The Attica prisoners' demands for better wages, the right

to unionize, and improved working and living conditions echo the sentiments of prisoners today. As in Attica, changing the situation through a grievance process that doesn't work, through courts that are hostile to prisoners, or through newspapers and petitions that politicians and the public ignore, is an unacceptable proposition. Action directly challenging the power of the authorities is necessary. In the words of the prison organizers themselves, "[w]e hope to end prison slavery by making it impossible, by refusing to be slaves any longer."

The prisoners participating in the September 9th strike are likely to face severe retaliation and punishment for their show of resistance, so it is imperative that students and other non-imprisoned allies make our voices heard loudly and clearly. We support the prisoners in their struggle against forced labor, and we will continue to organize and campaign in their defense. We are watching the prisons, and will fight back against any punitive retaliation against these prisoners, including the use of pepper spray, humiliating and unnecessary body searches, violence, isolation, and solitary confinement. The prisoners have the full solidarity of students, activists, and people of conscience around the country; they are not alone, and we hear their cries even through the concrete walls that cage them.

Until Liberation,

National Lawyers Guild, Harvard Law School Chapter